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RUEHPT/AMCONSUL PERTH 4904  
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SUBJECT: MIGRATION SURGE CAUSES GOVERNMENT CONCERN

REF: CANBERRA 255

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The continuing surge of migrants has caused the GOA to launch a review of its immigration program. In the 2008-09 fiscal year, permanent arrivals increased by 8.3 percent and temporary arrivals by 11 percent. Foreign students and tourists are fueling growth in the temporary arrival category. In response to the slowing economy, the GOA cut the permanent skilled intake earlier in the year. The GOA says its migration program will remain non-discriminatory and that environmental, economic and infrastructure concerns are driving the program's review. END SUMMARY.

#### CONTINUED RISE IN PERMANENT ARRIVALS

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¶2. (U) The permanent migration intake has increased by 70% over the last five years. In the 2008-2009 fiscal year, the number of permanent settlers increased by 158,630 to 171,800, a rise of 8.3%. Two-thirds were skilled migrants (a 5.5% increase) and a third were family sponsored (a 13% increase). The number of employer-sponsored permanent migrants, which constitutes a third of the skilled stream, increased by 60%.

#### BUT MORE TEMPORARY ARRIVALS

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¶3. (U) According to the review, 657,124 temporary migrants arrived in Australia over the past year (an 11 % increase) including 320,368 foreign students (a 15% increase). However, in contrast to the 60% increase in employer-sponsored permanent visas, the number of employer-sponsored temporary visas fell by 9% percent (Note: Some temporary entrants successfully apply for permanent residency. End Note). Immigration Minister Chris Evans pointed out that "more than 500,000" temporary migrants, such as foreign students and tourists, came to Australia over the past year, but lamented the public focus on the intake of skilled permanent migrants and boat people despite their relatively small numbers.

#### GOVERNMENT CONCERNED

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¶4. (U) Earlier in the year, the GOA cut the planned skilled migration intake in response to the slowing economy, and tightened rules concerning employer-sponsored temporary visas. Evans revealed the GOA's long-term migration plan is designed to meet Australia's population needs and the challenges that an otherwise stagnant population would pose to quality of life and the provision of adequate services, such as housing, transport, water, electricity and others. He said Australia's immigration policy would remain non-discriminatory and that the country's Muslim communities posed no fundamental threat.

## TIME TO TAKE STOCK

¶5. (SBU) Some want to label the Rudd government inconsistent on immigration. While Evans announced the residency requirement for naturalization will be reduced from four years to two for highly talented athletes, he also increased visa requirements for international students because of evidence that some migration agents had used fraudulent documents. Critics have also blamed the surge in migration for accommodation shortages and infrastructure problems, particularly in big cities like Sydney and Melbourne.

### ¶6. (SBU) COMMENT:

Given the changes in Australia's population make up over the last decade, it seems logical for the GOA to review its migration policy. The controversy surrounding Indian students in Australia (reftel) and the difficult economic environment are even more pressing reasons for the review. An improved Qare even more pressing reasons for the review. An improved migration program could complement the Rudd government's agenda across a wide range of areas, such as the environment, infrastructure and affordable housing.

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